

ALTO - LUTE by JACOB LANGENWALDER / KREMSMÜNSTER ABBEY

The music archive of Kremsmünster Abbey (Upper Austria) has housed six lutes since the 16th century, which have been preserved to this day in a condition unchanged from around 1720. These instruments are in a historically unique state and are currently (2013-2014) being conserved and documented as part of an international research project initiated by the abbey at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, under the direction of Klaus Martius, the world's leading expert in this field. The archival records held by the abbey provide us with excellent information about the origin and history of all these instruments. The alto lute from the workshop of Jacob Langenwalder in Füssen was purchased in 1627 by the then "court lutenist to the abbot," Benedikt Lechler, on behalf of the monastery, and has been located at this site ever since. It was evidently (traces of use on the instrument!) used intensively throughout the entire period of lute music cultivation in Kremsmünster until around the end of the 18th century and thus represents the rarely preserved type of a working instrument of the time. Only a modification in 1678 by the monastery's violin maker, Matthias Greimbl, appears to have been carried out. Otherwise, the instrument is in the completely original condition of a lute from the turn of the 16th to the 17th century. This was also one of the most significant periods in the long European history of this instrument family from an organological perspective.

Having a repertoire for these instruments (which is currently being researched and published in the same research project) also allows us to identify the music composed for these instruments, and even the players from the abbey by name. In the case of the Langenwald lute, these are the historically significant figures of Father Benedikt Lechler (1594–1659) and Sigismund Gast (1645–1711).

The "Kremsmünster Lute Project," initiated by the abbey in May 2012, has attracted considerable international attention since its inception and was presented to the Austrian, European, and international public in 2013 at several events during supra-regional festivals, receiving widespread acclaim.

The unique feature of Langenwalder's surviving lute lies in its typology, which could be described as a central instrument for performing surviving lute music of Austrian origin. This branch of European music history has increasingly entered the public consciousness in the past four to five years through several publications on the subject. Initial effects of this are already observable on the international recording market.

The results of the Kremsmünster research, as well as the first-ever publication of the previously unpublished music from there, are likely to further promote this development. The reception of lute music from the territory of Habsburg-administered Central Europe in the 17th century is, in any case, only just beginning and is likely to see considerable growth in the coming years.

The research project commissioned by the foundation, which ensures the extremely costly documentation of the instrument, the growing interest in a hitherto little-researched area of historical performance practice, and the resulting need to have a currently underutilized type of instrument available for its realization, represent a stroke of luck for historical instrument making in the case of this exceptionally well-preserved lute by Jacob Langenwalder: Several internationally leading lute makers have already expressed keen interest in reconstructing precisely this instrument and making it available to a constantly expanding market demand.

Hubert Hoffmann